

this special occasion, I join in the chorus of congratulations and appreciation.

TRIBUTE TO THE ITALIAN
TRIBUNE COLUMBUS DAY PARADE

HON. WILLIAM J. MARTINI

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 21, 1996

Mr. MARTINI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the 26th Annual Columbus Day Celebration and Parade in Newark, NJ, sponsored by the Italian Tribune.

As we all know, Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of a New World. Shunned by skeptics and ridiculed by less adventurous souls, Columbus embarked on his trek armed with little more than a vision of the future and an irrefutable desire for success.

Christopher Columbus was born to a family of weavers and merchants in the Genoa Republic of northern Italy. He soon became a man of the world as he traveled through Spain and Portugal. Throughout his travels, Columbus became fascinated with the lore of the Orient. He soon became consumed with the idea of discovering a new quicker way to the shores of Asia. He believed that way was toward the oceans of the west.

On September 6, 1492, Columbus set sail from Palos in search of a more direct route to Asia, but only God knew his journey would bring even more wondrous discoveries. Two minutes after midnight on October 12, 1492, the screams of "Land! Land!" broke the silence of the night. As the *Pinta*, sailing ahead of the other ships, approached the sandy white beach, the crew raised the flag to its highest mast and fired a cannon to alert the other ships of the discovery.

While Columbus originally thought he had found a more direct route to Asia, he soon realized that he made a more remarkable discovery—a New World.

Mr. Speaker, over the last 26 years, this parade has been a cornerstone of the Italian-American and Newark community. Similar to the way Columbus breached the gap between the Old and the New Worlds, the parade brings together members of Newark's diverse population in a celebration of Christopher Columbus. This parade, in the spirit of Christopher Columbus, shows how the Newark community can overcome cultural differences to gather and celebrate with each other.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the Italian Tribune, and thank them for their continued support of this important community event.

"I AM ME"

HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 21, 1996

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to share with my colleagues the national award winning essay of Arlene Helderman from International Falls, MN. I offer Arlen's superb presentation, "I Am Me" to serve as an enlightened statement to the Na-

tion on the sanctity of human life. I want to offer my profound congratulations to Arlene and the Koochiching County Right-to-Life Committee and the Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life organization for their sponsorship of this annual competition.

I AM ME

(Pro-Life Speech by Arlene Helderman)

I am me.

In all the world, there is no one else exactly like me.

There are people who have some parts like me,

But no one adds up like me,

Therefore, everything that comes out of me, Is authentically mine, because I alone chose it.

I own everything about me:

My body—including everything it does,

My mind—including all its thoughts and ideas,

My eyes—including all the images they behold,

My feelings—whatever they may be,

And all of my actions—whether they be to others or to myself.

I own my fantasies, my dreams, my hopes, my fears.

I own all my triumphs and successes, all my failures and mistakes.

I own me, and therefore I engineer me,

To work in my best interests,

I can see, hear, feel, think, say and do.

I am me.

I am here today to talk about life. I am here, I am alive, and I am me because of a choice my mother made. Her choice is what accounts for many of the decisions I make now, because of the love present in her choice. I am me because my mom chose life.

Everything that makes me me, was decided at conception, when forty-six human chromosomes laid out my genetic code. All characteristics were then determined, such as sex, eye color, shoe size, intelligence—many characteristics we now take for granted. But it was then that they were laid out, to create the me that I am. Only twelve weeks later during my precious development, I had the ability to experience pain—the same pain I would one day experience at age twelve, when I would clumsily break my nose, I had tiny fingernails—the same fingernails I would paint so precariously years later, the night before my first formal dance. And my feet were perfectly shaped by this time—the same feet that I use now, to flex and point and dance and leap during my gymnastics routines. It's amazing, but at an early six weeks of my development, I had brain waves—brain waves that today enable me to create stories for English and calculate statistics for Math. And at an unbelievable three weeks, I had a heartbeat—the same heart which beats at seventeen, in anticipation of future dreams and aspirations. I am me, whether it be then or now. But I am only me because my mom chose life. The story of my mother's choice to keep my life is like no story you have ever heard, and you will probably never hear another quite like it.

Everything was so normal. My mother was twenty-nine years old, and she and my father were a young couple with a four-year-old little girl, a white house, (with no picket fence), but picture perfect in their eyes. As springtime neared, she discovered she was pregnant with her second child, which was good news. The first couple months went well, and she had lots of energy. But as time crept on into summer, she felt tired all the time and became ill with bronchitis. She started to lose weight, and she constantly prayed for the doctors to find out exactly what was wrong with her. After many tests and many wrong answers, the doctors diag-

nosed my mother with leukemia. The doctors told her it was crucial to start chemotherapy treatments right away, because she would only live six weeks without them. Unfortunately, they also said the baby would not survive with the treatment, and that her best chance would be to abort the unborn child.

It was fall, a time when things die naturally—leaves, flowers, grass; but what about—unnaturally? My mother had started her fifth month. She could feel the baby move inside her and it was like someone was trying to tear her heart out. She had to make a choice. Did she want to destroy her baby so she could have a greater chance at living, or did she want to continue on and hope, only to be told she'd have a greater chance at dying? Despite her threatening condition, she chose life.

In the next month, my mother experienced more pain than most people could ever imagine. She had a bone marrow test taken, a test so painful, that my petite mother, tore a metal railing from the hospital bed in the midst of her agony. She endured over twenty shots a day, forced herself to eat for the sake of her baby, was hooked up to IV's, and lost so much weight, that even at five months pregnant she only weighed eighty pounds. She endured so much pain, and she did it all for me. I don't know how I can ever thank my mom for the sacrifices she made for me, but the faith and love she had in me is something that will live in my heart, forever.

Another month passed, and my mother was feeling a little better. At seven months of the pregnancy, November twenty-fifth started out like any other day. She was weighed, and her IV's were changed, but by ten o'clock that morning, she was starting labor. The Doctors explained that most likely the baby would not survive, and for her safety, my mother should be flown to a larger hospital with better medical facilities. The hospital in her small town did not have the proper equipment if the baby was to survive. And so, although my mom persisted there was not enough time to make it to the hospital, they boarded her, a nurse, and a pilot onto a small air ambulance for an unforgettable journey. Halfway to the hospital I was born and I could not breathe. The nurse encouraged my mom to pray as she gave me resuscitation to try and keep me alive. The pilot radioed ahead for ambulances and to the hospital so everyone was ready for my arrival. The rest of the flight, forty minutes, was the longest forty minutes in my mother's life; but as we neared the landing, she thought she saw my tiny lip quiver, and it gave her hope.

For days, I was placed on oxygen to breathe, and time pressed on with the unavoidable question of survival. The doctors again said it did not look promising. They suggested to my parents to pick a name for me, therefore I was named after the nurse—Arlene, and the pilot—Frances, who were both so courageous during my birth. I was hooked up to oxygen and heart machines, and there were so many IV's in my tiny arm, that at fourteen inches long, two and half pounds, you could barely see me under all that equipment. When my mom entered the intensive care unit I was in, my heart monitor became extremely active, perhaps because I could feel her presence. It was then that my mom knew I would be okay.

After two months in an incubator, and weighing in at five pounds, I went home to a family that was anxiously waiting my arrival. My mom endured three more years of chemotherapy treatment. To this day, there is not a single trace of cancer in her body. Despite all of the odds and even when it looked like it couldn't get any worse, my mom and I broke medical history. We are alive, and we did it together.